

U.S. Defers Opening Diplomatic Relations With Lithuania

By John M. Goshko
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The Bush administration yesterday reiterated its moral support for Lithuania's move toward independence, but it added that opening diplomatic relations and other government-to-government dealings must wait until the Lithuanian people are "in control of their own destiny."

In dealing with what one U.S. official privately called "a matter of incredible delicacy and sensitivity," administration spokesmen sought to walk a careful line between encouragement of Lithuania's efforts to end 50 years of forced incorporation into the Soviet Union and not

causing trouble for Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of liberalization.

Asked by reporters why the United States did not accord full recognition to the Lithuanian government that proclaimed its independence on Sunday, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater replied:

"Because we would want any recognition to take into account a final government that was in control of their own destiny, and much of that has yet to be negotiated with the Soviet Union."

State Department spokesman Margaret Tutwiler added, "U.S. practice has been to establish formal relations with the lawful government of a state once that gov-

ernment is in effective control of its territory and capable of entering into and fulfilling international obligations. When we are satisfied that the Lithuanian government can meet these requirements, we will establish formal diplomatic relations with the new government."

Both Fitzwater and Tutwiler stuck to that position in the face of repeated requests for clarification about where the tangled state of U.S.-Lithuanian ties now stands. For many years, particularly during the Cold War period of the 1950s and 1960s, the United States contended that the Baltic states incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940—Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia—were "captive nations" and

gave them symbolic recognition as independent countries.

More recently, the old "captive nations" policy has become an embarrassment to U.S. policy-makers. They fear that Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*, or openness, which has permitted the movement of the former Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe toward democracy, might be derailed if the United States appears to be exploiting it to encourage the breakaway of areas regarded by Moscow as constituent parts of the Soviet Union.

For that reason, Fitzwater and Tutwiler yesterday steered around the recognition question by noting that the United States recognized Lithuania as an independent state in 1922 and never recognized its

forced incorporation into the Soviet Union at the outset of World War II. Although they did not say so specifically, that implies that further formal recognition is not necessary.

"The real issue here is not word games about recognition but how to get Lithuania launched on an independent course that has at least the reluctant agreement of the Soviet Union," said a senior U.S. official, who asked not to be identified. "That requires a negotiating process that's likely to take months before anyone can tell where it's going, and for the United States to rush in with heavy-handed statements will only make it harder for both sides to work their way through this."